

D.A. Pogodayeva, E.M. Bozhko

Ural Federal University named after the first President of Russia B.N. Yeltsin

Yekaterinburg, Russia

PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES IN ADAPTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE URAL FEDERAL UNIVERSITY

Abstract: Featuring a highly developed multilingual and international environment, in the last years UrFU has attracted many international students. This paper presents the results of a research aimed at identifying the consequences of the introduction of psychological assistance and support service for international students and teachers. The paper also analyses and discusses the main problems in the adaptation of international students, and the situation with this in UrFU and its consequences. The results are presented in charts. Being an international student, one of the authors provides an opinion on the situations and confirms most of the given issues. The paper also emphasizes the importance of maintaining psychological health. Description is given of the problem of students' ignoring their own psychological health and the main vectors of development of the university to solve this problem. As a result, the importance of the work of the psychological assistance service for the university is proved.

Keywords: education, psychological assistance, adaptation, international students.

Д.А. Погодаева, Е.М. Божко

Уральский Федеральный Университет имени первого Президента
России Б. Н. Ельцина
Екатеринбург, Россия

ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ СЛОЖНОСТИ АДАПТАЦИИ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ В УРАЛЬСКОМ ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОМ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ

Аннотация: Обладая высокоразвитой полиязычной и интернациональной средой, в последнее время УрФУ привлекает большое количество иностранных студентов. В данной статье приведены результаты исследования, направленного на выявление последствий введения службы психологической помощи и поддержки для иностранных обучающихся и преподавателей в университете. В статье рассмотрены и проанализированы основные проблемы в адаптации иностранных студентов, уделено внимание ситуации, сложившейся в УрФУ, а также ее последствиям. Результаты приведены в диаграммах. Являясь иностранным студентом, один из авторов статьи делится своим мнением о данных проблемах и подтверждает их значимость. Авторы выделяют важность сохранения психологического здоровья. Освещена проблема неосведомленности студентов о важности бережного отношения к своему психологическому здоровью. Выделены основные векторы развития университета, вследствие чего, доказана важность работы службы психологической помощи в стенах УрФУ.

Ключевые слова: образование, психологическая помощь, адаптация, иностранные обучающиеся.

International migration processes have made Russia the center of many cultures and faiths. According to the official sources, nowadays there are 3,114 international students from 84 countries all over the world, studying in the Ural Federal University [3]. Thus, the question of the

adaptation of the international students and teachers is urgent for the university.

As a social stratum, students are in the «special» risk zone in terms of their level of exposure to stressful situations. In this category, it is necessary to distinguish the problems the international students face in UrFU:

- 1) International students experience «culture shock»;
- 2) International students face difficulties in the course of their education: due to their low language proficiency they cannot learn educational material and communicate with the teacher;
- 3) Because of language barrier, cultural differences and even prejudice, international students often find themselves isolated from the Russian-speaking ones;
- 4) International students are far from the familiar environment and surroundings, their family, national culture, and customs;
- 5) International students often have difficulties communicating with external university services (government and municipal authorities, banks, transport system, etc.);
- 6) It is common for the international students to have issues when living together in dormitories with Russian-speaking students / students from countries with cultural differences.

These points had earlier been defined by many researchers. Kin Cheung (George) Lee from the University of the West, California, wrote a paper which provided many useful tips for the international students:

«Being an international student is never easy. Separation from loved ones, cultural clashes, discrimination, financial difficulties, homesickness, language barriers, legal status problems, and an unfamiliar educational system are formidable challenges that often trigger feelings of frustration, insecurity, confusion, and sadness» [2].

An online poll of 4 questions conducted by the authors among 480 international students showed the following results. (First, the question of the poll is given, and after that the results of the poll are analyzed):

- 1) Have you faced any difficulties, which led to the emotional exhaustion/severe stress? (Chart 1).

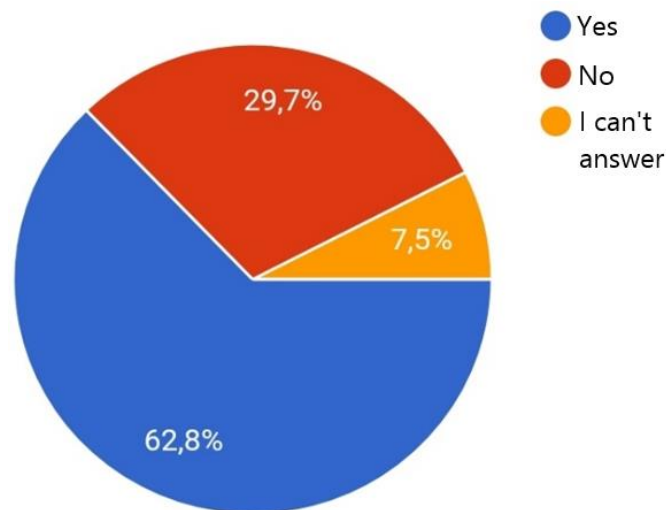


Chart 1 – Students, who have faced stress

62.2 % of the respondents answered positively and this did not come out of the blue: as it had been mentioned before, and as it is known - facing new things has never been easy. Being an international student, one of the authors can confirm that there are many difficulties leading to the severe stress and emotional exhaustion, especially in the initial period of stay in the new country.

2) How do you deal with emotional exhaustion/severe stress? (Chart 2).

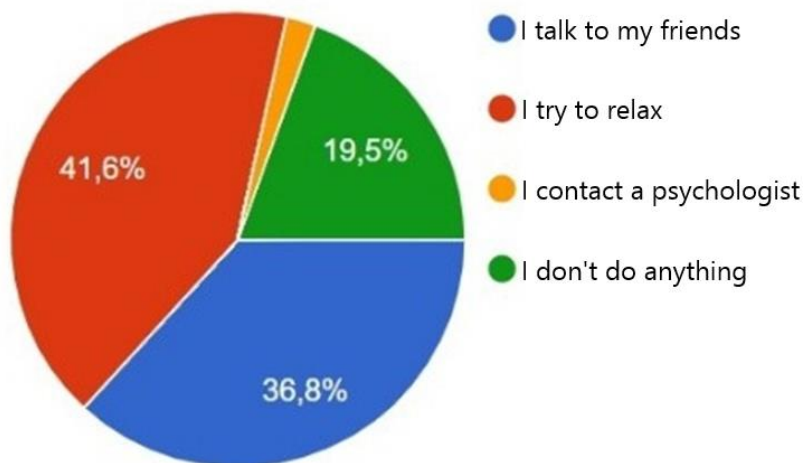


Chart 2 – Ways to deal with stress

The least amount of respondents chose an option «I contact a psychologist» which leads to the conclusion that students are not aware about the importance of psychological health.

The majority (41.6 %) answered that they «try to relax». Such a dismal trend sometimes leads to even more severe problems. The answer «I don't do anything» is no better. 19.5 % showed their indifference towards own health and well-being.

3) Have you ever faced a lack of psychological support? (Chart 3).

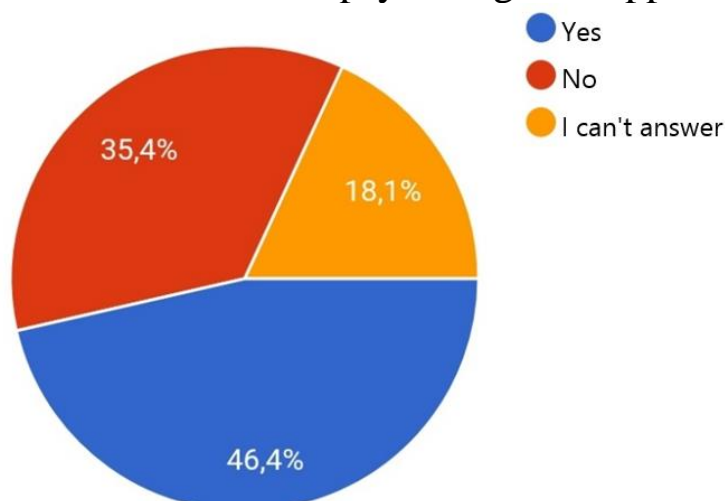


Chart 3 – Students, who faced lack of psychological support

The majority of respondents answered that they really have faced a lack of psychological support. To be exact, there are 46.4 % or 220 students, who are familiar with that problem. That is not an unexpected result, yet it does not show the situation at its best.

4) Have you ever had a desire to communicate with a psychologist? (Chart 4).

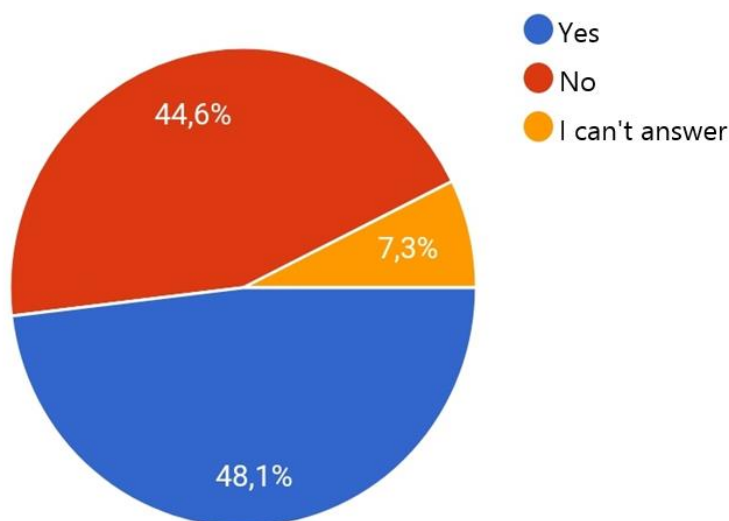


Chart 4 – Students, who would like to communicate with a psychologist

Thus, there are 48.1 % of the Ural Federal University students, who answered positively, 44.6 % answered negatively and 7.3 % decided not to answer at all. According to this information, the problem should be considered as an important one.

«Positive adaptation towards the educational space in the University contributes to the adaptive behavior of the person. It increases the motivation of an international student to such adaptive process as the

exploration of the culture tradition and customs in the host country and study of established foundation» [1].

Of course, establishing psychological support service is not the way to solve all mentioned problems. International students should make a lot of efforts themselves. Nevertheless, Kin Cheung (George) Lee accurately notices that international students are capable of doing that.

«Although international students face many challenges in their studies, they have plenty of unique strengths, such as their international perspective, independence, courage to live in a international country, and multilingual skills. Many international students are very hardworking and devoted to learning» [2].

Ural Federal University strives to create a comfortable international and multilingual environment. Therefore, the introduction of a unit providing psychological support for international students, as well as the development of the sphere of adaptation activities, is a must and priority for the Ural Federal University.

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